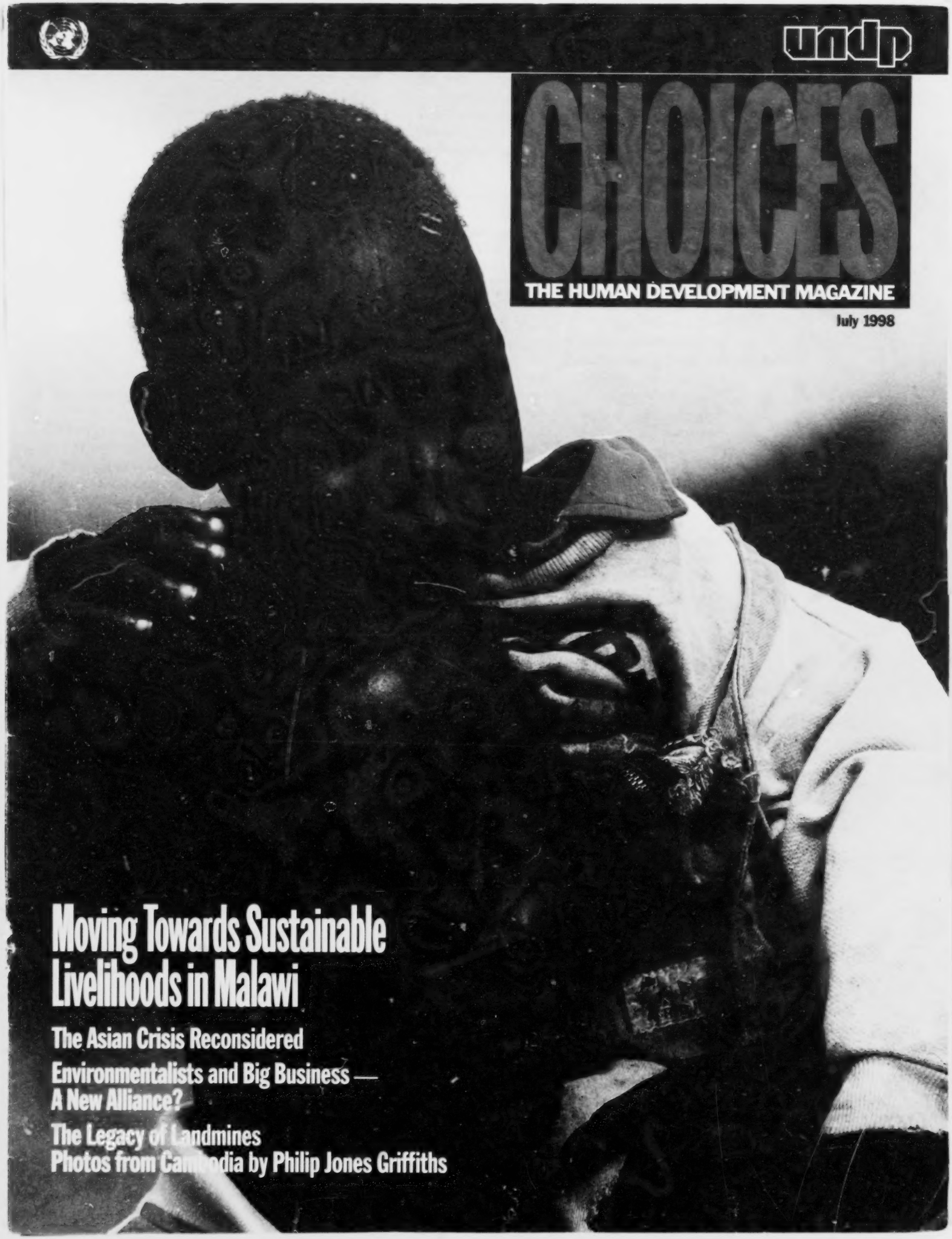

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CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

July 1998

Moving Towards Sustainable Livelihoods in Malawi

The Asian Crisis Reconsidered

Environmentalists and Big Business — A New Alliance?

The Legacy of Landmines

Photos from Cambodia by Philip Jones Griffiths

FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

There is a lot of excitement in Panama these days. A national dream will come to fruition on 31 December 1999, when the United States will give up control of the Panama Canal and turn it over to the Republic of Panama. An important chapter in the history of the country will thus come to a close, and a new era will begin. The excitement is as much about the prospects for increasing Panama's competitiveness in global markets as it is about the national pride linked to the return of a vital piece of its territory. Many of the Panamanians I met during a recent visit there expressed enthusiasm about new employment opportunities opening up as a result, and the chance for the country to eliminate the worst aspects of poverty.

The Panama Canal is often referred to as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Indeed, with its rare combination of intricate locks and artificial lakes, the canal is a wondrous engineering feat. It takes eight to ten hours for ships to transit through the 80-kilometre canal that joins the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Without the canal, ships would have to journey for up to 21 days to reach their destinations, traversing the entire South American continent.

Preparing to assume control of the canal has been a daunting task for the government and a subject of hot political and social debate. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) played a pivotal role in setting the stage for these discussions through a national consensus-building exercise that started in 1993 and brought together members of Panamanian society. This forum, called "Panama 2000," opened a dialogue among representatives of government, non-governmental organizations, political parties, the media, and indigenous and women's groups to forge agreement and plan for the future administration and management of the canal. For UNDP, national consensus-building is part of what we refer to as "good governance"—a key element of the organization's work. Among the crucial issues discussed at the forum: how to assure the international community that the canal will continue to be professionally managed and shielded from the winds of political change.

Assuming control of the Panama Canal has been a daunting task for the government and a subject of hot political and social debate.

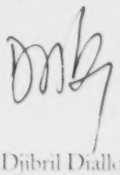
During my visit to Panama in April, Jorge Eduardo Ritter, the minister for canal affairs, explained to a group of journalists how UNDP was called upon to use its good offices to facilitate this national dialogue.

Ritter was presiding over a ceremony at the Panama Canal Museum to mark the launch of another UNDP initiative—the development of a CD-ROM chronicling the history of the canal. According to Ligia Elizondo, UNDP resident representative in Panama, production of this CD-ROM "will make it easier for communicators, libraries, academic institutions and members of Panamanian society—especially youth—to have access to the chronology of the canal, which is an important part of the country's history."

For me, the event bore special significance because I was there to run a training workshop for UNDP public affairs officers from Latin American and the Caribbean. They came from 19 countries to see how they can work together to strengthen the image of UNDP and other United Nations agencies throughout the region. Often, the success of promoting an organization depends on how well it can define its strengths and accomplishments. And in the case of Panama, UNDP's role and contribution to the country could not be clearer.

UNDP has no shortage of other good stories to tell in Latin America and the Caribbean, whether it be peace-building and governance interventions in Central America, environmental efforts in Brazil, Cuba and Guyana, electoral support in Mexico and Haiti, decentralization programmes in Argentina and Bolivia, or its work in promoting poverty eradication and gender awareness throughout the region. Our goal now is to communicate these successes more effectively everywhere.

As the case of Panama shows, while UNDP's role might not always be visible at first glance, it is typically highly strategic, well-defined and vital to a nation's development aspirations.



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Cover photo of father and son in Malawi by Radhika Chalasani.

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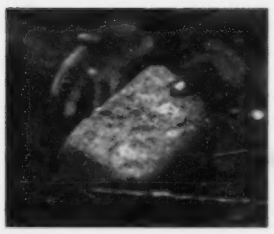

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THE EAST ASIAN CRISIS: JUST FIX WHAT'S BROKEN

By Mahbub ul Haq

Asia's financial troubles are temporary setbacks, not a symptom of deeply-rooted problems, this author argues. In making any adjustments, human development should not be ignored.

The countries of East Asia are like speedy, well-built cars. Recently they hit a few bumps in the road, blowing out the tires. But instead of fixing the flats, the international financial institutions are trying to reinvent the car. That is a mistake.

Nothing is intrinsically wrong with East Asian economies. The labour force is educated, well-trained and technologically skilled. The rate of domestic savings—still about the highest in the world—normally exceeds one-third of national incomes. Budget deficits—among the lowest in the world—are generally below two per cent of gross national product. Economies are open, tariffs are low, economic institutions fairly well-established, and export competitiveness respected in global markets. Most developing countries will take decades to reach East Asia's position in the world economy.

The current crisis is one of short-term liquidity, not long-term development. East Asian banks made some bad loans, but this is not unusual in an exciting period of fast-paced growth. Short-term debts, particularly the inflow of speculative funds, was not carefully monitored. The US and Japanese economies suf-

fered worse financial troubles in the past (lest we forget the savings and loan fiasco in the United States and the stock exchange bubble in Japan). The United States and Japan managed to fix their problems over time; there was no need to redesign the automobile.

That is why so much of the current thinking on the East Asian crisis is baffling. For a start, it is the height of intellectual dishonesty to call an experience the "East Asian Miracle" for the last two decades and then, within a year, to start labelling it as "Crony Capitalism." Nothing much has changed in East Asian economic fundamentals.

What is also amazing is that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is applying the same cookie-cutter approach to the problems of East Asia as it does to all of its clients in the developing world. Countries have been advised to reduce budget deficits, for instance. But one may ask why this is necessary when such deficits are already low and when there is a need to grow these economies, not to deflate them. It is also important to remember that private financial markets, and not profligate governments, were the source of financial irresponsibility in East Asia. Why rush in with the same standard recipe of cutting down government spending, downsizing public institutions, sacrificing social safety nets, and often slashing education and health budgets—thereby unbalancing human lives while overbalancing financial budgets?

In fact, the East Asian crisis says more about the lack of global economic governance than about the inefficiency of national actions. The world simply does not have a credible lender of last resort that can bail out countries from short-term liquidity squeezes and prevent long-term economic damage. Central

banks perform this role at the national level. But we have no global Central Bank. The IMF is a pale shadow of what it was supposed to be. At the IMF's creation in 1944, John Maynard Keynes wanted the institution to have resources equal to 50 per cent of world imports, while the powerful US delegate, Harry White, held out for a more conservative target of 15 per cent. Today the IMF's resources now equal around one per cent of the world's imports. Private speculators can, in a day, mobilize over ten times as much in financial flows as the IMF commands in total. It is fair to ask whether world monetary policy is run by the IMF or by private speculators.

What is more, financial hurricanes now speed across borders at the rate of over US$1,200 billion every 24 hours at the touch of a computer key. The speed of these transactions is breathtaking, their direction unpredictable, and their impact sometimes destabilizing. These financial flows are inspired both by rational expectations and by irrational panic. That is why James Tobin, Nobel Laureate in Economics, suggested about two decades ago that a small tax be imposed ("Tobin tax") to throw some sand in the wheels of these panicky financial flows. The purpose of the tax would be to raise the cost of short-term currency transactions without affecting long-term investments, ensuring greater national control over global currency movements. In the aftermath of the East Asian crisis, Tobin's proposal merits even more serious consideration.

At least three lessons can be drawn from the recent East Asian experience. The first is that globalization should still be treated as an opportunity, not as a threat, though it needs to be skillfully managed. I was amazed, for example, that a number of South Asian policymakers (particularly in India and Pakistan) started congratulating themselves on having *not* adopted the economic liberalization policies of their East Asian neighbours and having escaped the recent turbulence. This is a mistaken view. East Asia started behind South Asia in 1960 and is now 27 times ahead in terms of its average per capita income. South Asia is a bicycle economy (compared to the car economy of East Asia), and the absence of a tire puncture should be no cause for celebration. The challenge is to graduate to a car economy, which cannot be accomplished without universal education, rising investment and fast economic liberalization—the path that East Asia has already taken.

Second, whatever adjustment measures are taken, governments must protect human development levels and social safety nets. The World Bank's own studies demonstrate that as much as 80 per cent of East Asia's real economic wealth consists of human and social capital. If that is sacrificed in the process of cleaning up the financial system, the real costs will be devastating and wholly unnecessary.

Third, East Asia *does* need to make some structural changes. China has emerged as the low-cost supplier of low- and medium-tech consumer goods to the growing middle class of the world. East Asia must reposition itself to higher technologies, better skills and more complex manufacturing processes—much as Japan was obliged to do by the challenge of the East Asian tigers three decades ago.

It is time for a calm analysis of what really went wrong in East Asia. And where we went wrong in our own understanding and analysis. Some intellectual humility will help. ■

Mahbub ul Haq is president of the Human Development Centre in Islamabad, former finance minister of Pakistan, and founder of UNDP's Human Development Report.

(Facing page) Stock exchange monitor delivers bad economic news to investors like this one in Hong Kong and elsewhere in Asia.

LOCAL KNOW-HOW

If asked in the right way, the poor will articulate what can help them get ahead. Finally, governments and international organizations are starting to listen.

THE RIGHT STUFF

By Kristin Helmore

Nyamawende is a string of small, mud-brick huts with palm-thatch roofs that stretch between two balding hills on the main road to Zambia. Drenched by El Niño rains, the village looks lush and green. But during the long dry season, and the short "rainy" seasons of late, it can be a dusty, hungry-looking place, typical of thousands of villages in the developing world. Malnutrition in children is common here; clean water is scarce; wood for fuel is hard to come by; deforestation is accelerating; soils are overworked; more than one-third of the men and two-thirds of the women are illiterate; and from among the community's 223 families, only seven children attend secondary school.

Although this part of western Malawi is poor and underdeveloped, Nyamawende is not standing still. It is the site of a pilot programme for a new, integrated approach to development called "sustainable livelihoods." For three weeks in August and September last year, the people of Nyamawende took part in an assessment process with the rather odd name of PAPSL—Participatory Assessment and Planning for Sustainable Livelihoods. By the end of that time, the villagers had produced 11 "action plans" to solve their most pressing economic, environmental and social problems. The community then set about implementing most of them without waiting for outside assistance.

The list of action plans reads like a comprehensive development programme, covering virtually all sectors (health, gender, agriculture, environment, nutrition, income-generation, education, child development, family planning) that donors usually address in isolation from one another. The assessment process that helped produce the list was a free-wheeling combination of interviews conducted by six Malawian facilitators. It included group discussions under a tree, walks through the village, role-playing and story-telling, and analytical exercises such

as the "problem tree," which diagrams the components of a problem from its root causes to its branching effects. Conducted simultaneously in five villages in Malawi's Mchinji district, PAPSL is the first stage of a government-sponsored effort, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to promote food security in Malawi by strengthening the livelihood systems of the poor.

The wealth of the poor

Sustainable livelihoods (SL) is a new approach to development in that it takes as its starting-point not poverty but the "wealth" of the poor: the knowledge, skills and adaptive strategies that have enabled the poor to survive over the years, often against terrible odds. Adaptive strategies—the changes and adjustments people make in their livelihood systems in order to cope under difficult circumstances—serve as the "entry-point" of the SL approach. According to Naresh Singh, who helped develop the sustainable livelihoods methodology at Canada's International Institute for Sustainable Development and introduced it at UNDP in 1996, "the simple act of focusing on what people already know and do—instead of on what they *need*—shifts the perception the poor have of themselves from one of helpless victims of circumstance to one of capable actors who can control their own destiny."

The adaptive strategies that enable poor people all over the world to overcome crises and survive hardships are illuminating. People in Nyamawende have adjusted to steadily decreasing rainfall by planting drought-resistant crops such as sweet potatoes and soybeans. In Ethiopia, agro-pastoralists have hedged their bets on survival in harsh and changing climatic conditions by mixing cattle, sheep, goats and camels in their flocks. In Zimbabwe, herders in the village of Mlambaphele have managed for decades to keep their cattle alive in severe drought conditions by shifting them to "summer" pastures six months of the year.

Home-grown action plans

During the three-week assessment in Nyamawende, the adaptive strategy of growing drought-resistant crops was analyzed, and ways of making it more productive were examined. Although the villagers harvested soybeans, for example, they were not deriving full benefit from this nutritious crop because they did not know how to process soybeans for home consumption. They sold them instead. Their plans therefore include training in growing, processing and preparing nutritious foods, and the planting of alternative crops such as sorghum and millet. They also include the use of compost manure instead of chemical fertilizers.

Most of Nyamawende's plans fall within the framework of priorities the SL programme has developed. In addition to food security, these priorities include environmental sustainability, enterprise development, technology, microfinance and gender. The villagers' new agenda for Nyamawende includes the provision of safe drinking water and the restoration of a degraded environment by planting woodlots, controlling the cutting of trees, and reforesting barren hillsides. There are plans to promote commerce by repairing and widening five unpaved roads that connect the village to other communities, and to increase incomes by starting businesses and providing skills training. Other activities include encouragement of adult literacy, family planning, construction of two nursery-schools, and the introduction of technologies to lighten women's workloads.

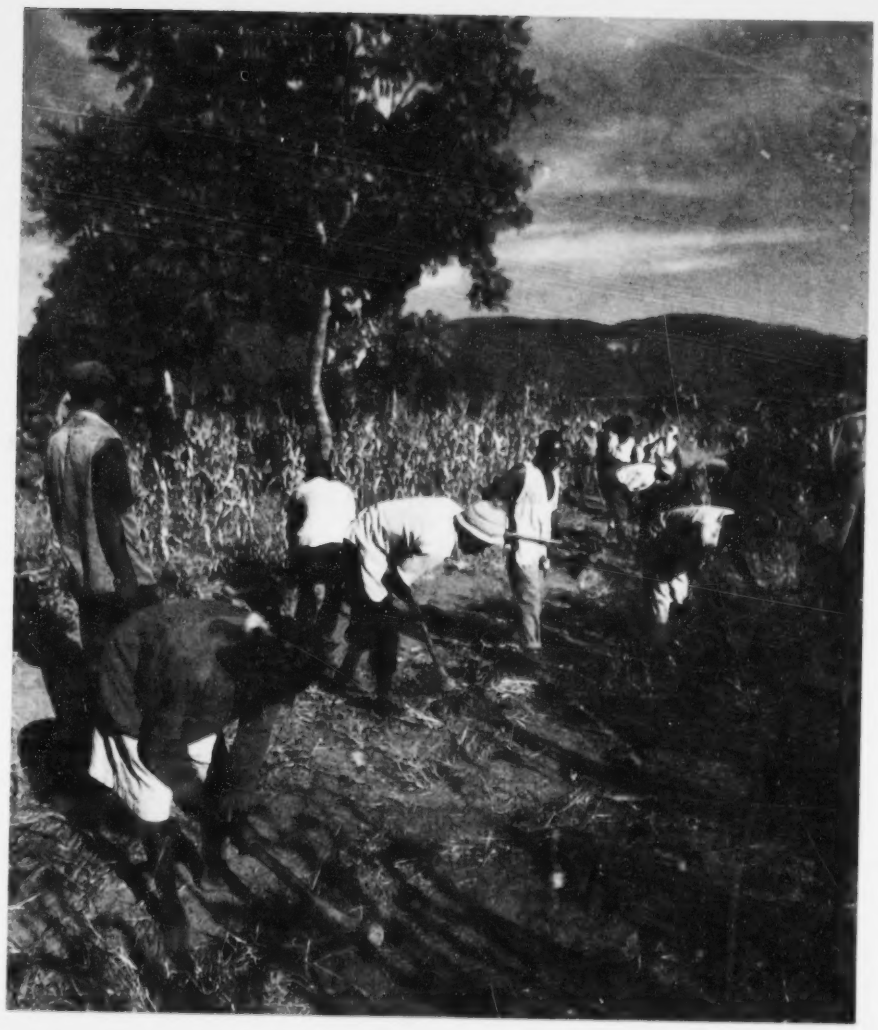
Participation, not consultation

The fact that the Nyamawende action plans were produced by the villagers and not imposed from outside, might prove to be the most significant predictor of the programme's success. According to Naresh Singh, this is what sets SL apart from the traditional development process known as integrated rural development.

"Integrated rural development is largely a donor-driven exercise," he says. "Donors who are sponsoring different projects try to bring them together in an integrated framework. But this is inherently 'top-down.' The people themselves have little or no voice in the process." Singh points out that this approach is based on consultation rather than participation, and that its objectives are in fact the donors' objectives, not those of the people themselves. "A consultation is different from participation," he insists. "With a consultation, first you design your project, then you consult the people, and they are expected to participate in your project. This does not work."

In Nyamawende, a group of about 60 villagers gathers for about three hours every morning to work on their road-

LOCAL KNOW-HOW
THE RIGHT STUFF



Residents of Nyamawende devote about three hours each morning to opening a new road to a neighbouring village.

clearing project. A women's group has started a bee-keeping enterprise with a loan from the District Development Office; the women expect to pay off their loan soon and apply for new financing for dress-making and other businesses. Women also meet regularly for literacy classes at the home of a designated teacher. Bricks are being made for a new school and villagers have learned how to make compost manure for their fields. The cutting of trees and other vegetation for fuel is gradually being replaced by the local manufacture of briquettes made with a simple machine that compresses leaves, grasses and crop residues into a cheap and effective source of fuel. Although some of these initiatives were in the works before the PAPSL process began, the programme appears to have provided a framework to support villagers' livelihoods and take care of various local problems as well.

Villager uses local materials to construct a granary to store maize and other food crops.

Peter Kulemeka, team leader of the SL programme in Malawi, is particularly impressed with the villagers' initiative to start a community police force to guard against thieves and cattle rustlers. "It's definitely something they would not have done without the participatory exercise," he says. "Through PAPSL, people were able to get together and discuss a solution to something that is affecting them all." Coming together to analyze a problem and devise a solution was simply not part of the local culture, he said.

B.T. Costantinos, one of the designers of Malawi's SL programme, maintains that in many cultures the ravages of colonialism, followed by dictatorships, have tended to stifle individual incentive and self-reliance. "There is an element of fatalism, of discouragement, of what I would call disempowerment," he says. The sustainable livelihoods process trains its facilitators to help people look at themselves and the world in a new light. "The planning process is designed to create self-awareness within communities," says Costantinos. "Once people realize that they can do things for themselves and create the necessary leadership and organizations for this, nothing stops them. They use every resource available. They change the world around them."

"Once people realize that they can do things for themselves, nothing stops them. They change the world around them."

The facilitators in Nyamawende lived in the village throughout the three-week-long assessment process. They remained on weekends and attended church with the villagers. "We didn't consider whether it was Saturday or Sunday," says Peter Jere, the lead facilitator. "On Sunday we went to their church, and as a result of that they opened up to us."

Once trust was established in Nyamawende, everyone in the village wanted to take part in the talks, activities and exercises of the PAPSL process, says Jere. Even delicate personal problems were discussed. During the role-playing exercises, issues such as providing enough food for children and fulfilling parental responsibilities prompted frank discussions of how alcohol consumption among men can lead to failure to provide adequately for their families. Tucked away in the pages of several village action plans are strategies designed to discourage excessive beer-drinking. These include participation in Family Life Education sessions, and the organization of youth clubs and recreational activities. Such suggestions might seem unusual in the context of a development programme, but since they are based on close examination of the lives and concerns of people in Nyamawende, they seek to address the everyday problems that people are dealing with.

"The advantage that UNDP sees in sustainable livelihoods is that it moves beyond the traditional sectoral or thematic approaches that development work has been locked into for so long," says Thierry Lemaresquier, director of the social development and poverty elimination division at UNDP. "In organizations like ours, it becomes very difficult to realize the wholeness of a community's situation. We tend to separate everything into water-tight compartments—gender, environment, income-generation, and so on."

So far, the PAPSL exercise has been carried out in a dozen countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, but Malawi is the only country where a fully-fledged SL programme has been launched. In

Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, the assessment process alone has produced positive results. For example, communities of herders in Ethiopia have entered directly into credit relationships with local NGOs, which are providing them with affordable financing for the first time. In the village of Mlambaphele in southern Zimbabwe, herders have diversified their livelihoods into agriculture with the help of simple technologies suggested by Phosiso Sola, the SL facilitator there. Following her work on the SL programme in 1994, Ms. Sola has applied its methodology in every project she has been involved in. "I've been stealing SL ideas," she says. "Since 1994, in whatever project I do, I make sure I stick to the adaptive strategies and sustainable livelihoods system. I think it's the best way. The people really feel they are part of the system, not 'parcels' in the system. It does work."

Livelihoods rather than jobs

According to Singh, SL seeks to promote fundamental changes in thinking at every level, from development policymakers to impoverished villagers themselves. "In the past we applied the traditional labour market/job analysis to try to provide jobs for poor people," says Singh. "This has always failed, and it will continue to fail, because it does not grapple with the ways in which people actually make their living. The poor almost never have jobs; they *do* jobs. They are self-employed, doing a whole range of things, very clever mixes of activities, assets and entitlements that allow them to survive."

In the SL lexicon, "assets" can mean anything used to provide a livelihood, from land, livestock, skills, knowledge or natural resources. "Entitlements" are support-systems one can depend on, such as family or clan relationships or, in industrialized countries, various forms of social security. For livelihoods to be sustainable, these assets and entitlements must be drawn on in a manner that does not exhaust available resources.

"The poor almost never have jobs. They *do* jobs. They are self-employed, doing a whole range of things that allows them to survive."

Singh maintains that even in industrialized countries, focusing exclusively on jobs is not the answer. Politicians in the West point to successful job-creating policies, he says, but the earnings from such jobs are often inadequate to feed or house a family. And in developing countries, even high-status jobs frequently fail to provide livelihoods. Singh cites the case of an assistant permanent secretary in one African government: "He was selling tomatoes right in his office, and he sent his children out to sell candies and tomatoes in the streets, all to supplement his income. This man has a job, almost a permanent job, but it doesn't provide a livelihood."

Technology, investments, policy

With the SL approach, donors participate as needed in locally-designed projects, such as those described in the Nyamawende action plans. Donors may also offer advice on project design, based on relevant information that the villagers may not have. The support of such donors, or development agencies, falls into one of three key categories: technology, investments and policy. According to Singh, work in each of these areas should take place simultaneously.

Science and technology are applied where appropriate to make local livelihood systems more sustainable (i.e., more lasting, economically efficient and mindful of the environmental needs of future generations), as well as more productive. In Nyamawende, for example, seeds of fast-growing, drought-tolerant indigenous trees are being made available for a local reforestation project.

SL aims to identify appropriate interventions that can be funded by a variety of donors. "That's the beauty of being cross-thematic," says UNDP's Lemaresquier. "There are many NGOs on the ground, especially in countries like Malawi. If you apply this approach you increase the chances that other donors will see how they can contribute. It opens up all kinds of opportunities."

Village banking systems that offer credit and savings schemes are also being set up to provide sustainable economic support to SL programmes. In Mchinji district, where Nyamawende is located, the SL programme has established a state-of-the-art, computerized District Develop-

LOCAL KNOW-HOW THE RIGHT STUFF

Harvesting maize in Nyamawende. For next year's crop, villagers will substitute expensive fertilizers with compost.

LOCAL KNOW-HOW THE RIGHT STUFF

ment Fund designed to handle the various sums of money needed to implement village action plans, from as many as 80 donors at one time. "Eventually, district development officers and even villagers themselves will be able to use a computerized network in the district office to hook up to technologies that might meet their needs or communicate directly with a wide range of potential donors for the funding of specific projects," says Terence Jones, UNDP resident representative in Malawi.

At the governance and policy level, the intervention of donors is a more delicate process. But according to Lemarequier, it is crucial to poverty eradication. "Legislation in most countries continues to be anti-poor," he maintains. "If it were not, we would not have the levels of poverty that we have today. Removing the policies that obstruct true development is the key."

In the case of Malawi there is also a history of dictatorship to contend with, says Kristine Jones, PAPSL adviser to the National Economic Council of Malawi. "In the past, the central government thought up good policies or bad policies and imposed them on the country," she says. "SL is trying to turn that around so that policy is informed by people on the ground, by rural communities." This involves identifying policies (past and present) that hinder people's livelihood systems and persuading local or national policymakers to change them accordingly. The idea is that the process of democratization taking hold in many countries will increasingly enable local people and the organizations that represent them to serve as policy "watchdogs." Such grassroots advocates can then lobby policymakers to design policies aimed at making livelihoods more sustainable and more productive, rather than the reverse.

In Zimbabwe, for example, the policy of distributing subsidized maize to

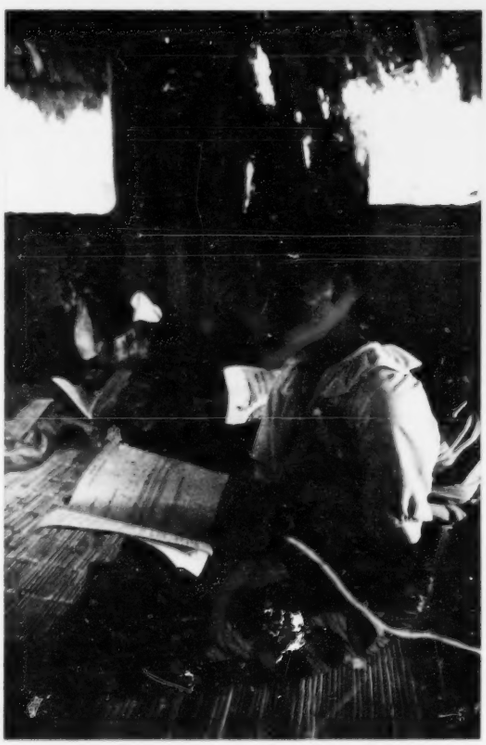
(Top) Making bricks for a new school. (Below) A dozen women in Nyamawende have learned to read and write and do basic math through a literacy class led by a local woman.

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION

The concept of participatory development was introduced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in 1970. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes what he calls "training for transformation," a methodology for teaching illiterate adults how to think critically about themselves and their circumstances. More recently, such ideas have been carried forward and expanded by Robert Chambers of the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University, UK. Chambers is co-author with Gordon Conway of a widely-read paper published in 1992, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century." He is best known for his more recent book, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last.*

The three-week assessment process that spurred the villagers of Nyamawende to produce their action plans is a fusion of three development methodologies: training for transformation, which seeks to "awaken" and "empower" the poor to take charge of their own development; participatory rural appraisal, a system of research and information gathering involving local people in a detailed study of their community and livelihood systems; and a planning methodology designed to produce strategies for action. The "PAPSL User's Guide" is the first development handbook that combines these three approaches into a single process.

When carried out effectively, PAPSL can indeed be a transformational experience, according to Kristine Jones, an adviser to the National Economic Council of Malawi. "With the idea of participatory development comes a whole box of tools for facilitating people's participation," says Jones. Such tools include role-plays, analytical devices such as the "problem tree," parables, stories or "codes" that illustrate certain abstract concepts such as dependency versus self-reliance and stimulate people to analyze the circumstances in which they live. "It's all very exciting," says Jones, "but on the ground it's really difficult to do. In a context like Malawi's, people aren't used to making decisions. People don't realize that their government is accountable to them, and that they can do planning for themselves. The sustainable livelihoods approach is trying to open up that avenue for people."



Peter Jere, considered by his colleagues to be one of the best PAPSL facilitators in Malawi, feels strongly, indeed passionately, that the right kind of training for facilitators is essential. He says it is not only the villagers who need transformation, but the facilitators themselves. "A one-week training leaves everything mechanical," he insists. "A one-month training that focuses more on concepts and beliefs is the most effective. Do you really believe that the local people have the knowledge? Is it really coming from your heart that they have the knowledge, or do you say it just because it is written in books by Robert Chambers?"—*K.H.*

"Legislation in most countries tends to be anti-poor. If it were not, we would not have the levels of poverty that we have today."

villagers in Mlambaphele in times of drought has turned people away from traditional "small grains" like millet and sorghum, and given them a taste for maize instead. The problem is that maize cannot be grown in their area because of very low rainfall. Identifying such "perverse subsidies" and lobbying to change them is the final step of the SL process.

Mechanisms to accomplish this are not yet in place in Malawi. On the other hand, as Terence Jones points out, the entire SL approach is designed to encourage responsiveness on the part of government. "We are trying to devolve government responsibilities to the district level so that government is closer to the people," says Jones. "From what we've seen, this approach generates effective demand from the communities and empowers them to access resources available from government, NGOs and others. It's a nice combination of trying to make government more responsive to the people from the top, building the demand from the bottom, and hoping the two will work effectively together."

Such synergy, adds Jones, will depend to a large extent on effective communication. The SL programme in Malawi is working to set up what it calls a multitrack communications system that will identify a variety of ways in which people can interact with one another—whether it be villagers and policymakers, villagers and extension agents, donors and policymakers, or donors and villagers.

UNESCO, for example, is supporting an experiment in community radio to see if rural villages will exchange information about common issues and problems. Through another initiative, plays and musical productions are being successfully used to convey development messages. Plans are also in the works to train journalists to interview community members in rural areas, so that the programmes can be aired on radio and heard by policymakers in capital cities. "It's a feedback mechanism," says Jones.

Grandmother cares for infant in Nyamawende while the mother tends to early morning chores.

Pitfalls and progress

Like any methodology, the success of sustainable livelihoods depends on how skilfully its techniques are applied as well as on the dynamics of the groups involved. The results of the three-week assessments in five villages in the Mchinji district, for example, are uneven. In one village, observers felt that facilitators focused too much on needs and too little on adaptive strategies and other assets of the community. As a consequence, villagers expected handouts of one kind or another and were disappointed when none were forthcoming.

Sustainable livelihoods is still in the early stages in Malawi. Nevertheless, it is already proving its effectiveness by attracting other development partners. Once apprised of villagers' needs in Nyamawende, Save the Children Fund (UK) agreed to drill three new boreholes to provide clean drinking water. Other international NGOs—including Oxfam, Action Aid, Concern Universal and Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief—are working with Malawi's SL programme or plan to do so.

Another organization, Self Help Development International, has suggested that the SL programme be launched in the district of Chiradzulu, where the NGO has been working for four years. According to Self Help's project manager, Winston Chiwaya, his organization is willing to fund any action plans that the SL process generates.

When it works, sustainable livelihoods can set in motion an engine for development that is powered by the poor.

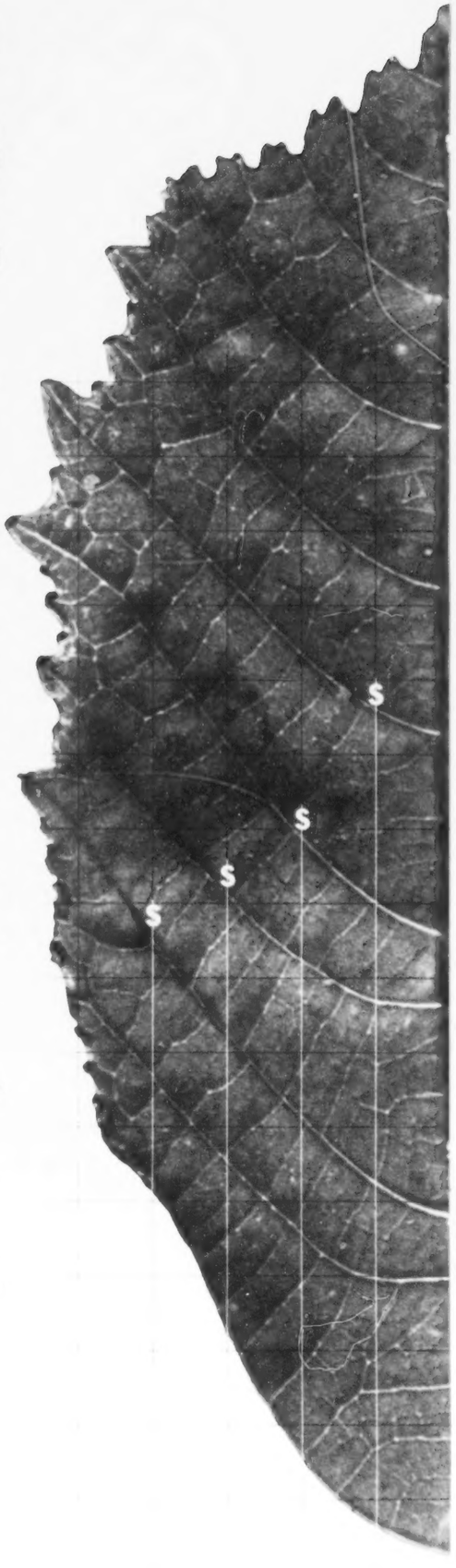
"Sometimes people say, 'Oh, these rural people can't plan for themselves,'" says Chiwaya. "And in fact, if you go to a village and ask people what they want to do, they will never, never tell you. But once you stay in the village and discuss things with them, they are able to identify problems. They will also tell you the best way to solve them." ■

Kristin Helmore, a freelance journalist based in the US, has won numerous awards for development journalism. Formerly, she was third world correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor *and editor of* African Farmer *magazine.*

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: THE DEVIL MAY CARE

Though oftentimes demonized by environmentalists, industry is proving an innovative partner in the search for sustainable development.

By Jon Tinker



Back in the 1960s, most of us thought of the environment in terms of a medieval morality play. We environmentalists, of course, were the Good Guys who fought the captains of industry, the Forces of Darkness. One day, we believed, there would be enough regulations to control bad industry and enough environmental inspectors to ensure that the rules were obeyed.

Thirty years later, those clear moral certainties are gone. Conservation has evolved into sustainable development (SD). And instead of denouncing the Devil of Industry and all his works, the Goodies have become hopelessly ensnared in dialogue with him.

Most worrisome to all true believers, the debate between the SD movement and the private sector is proving remarkably fruitful. Indeed, this interface is the origin of many of the most interesting and provocative new ideas in sustainable development today.

The strategy for environmental protection in the 1970s relied overwhelmingly on government regulations and inspectors. Dubbed "command-and-control" by business (an inspired name, with its resonance of the Soviet command economy), it involved government laying out detailed rules and using bureaucratic procedures to enforce them. Industry says that centralized hands-on regulation is inherently expensive and inefficient: the rules take so long to draw up that they impose standards that are two or more years out of date.

There are a number of reasons why command-and-control is no longer appropriate as a sole or primary strategy (except in some areas, such as nuclear power safety). Over the years, our concept of the proper role of the state has narrowed, with a growing distaste for unnecessary bureaucratic control. And globalization has created entirely new possibilities for market-based environmental management (current plans for the Ukraine and the United States to trade in carbon dioxide emissions, for example, would have been unthinkable 20 years ago). A third reason is that the growth of civil society and its empowerment through the Internet have substantially increased the risks to business of egregiously bad environmental behaviour. In most countries, environmental stupidity by industry is now likely to be exposed, and public pressure is able to insist on expensive remedies.

However, one factor stands out above all: the rule-book approach to the environment is just too expensive. Even the rich

industrialized countries can't afford more and more regulations, inspectors and control boards. And for the developing world, using scarce skilled workers as environmental police seems even less practical. The tendency now in the major industrialized countries is for government to set performance goals, and to let industry decide how to reach them.

I first reacted to this concept with knee-jerk hostility. You just can't *trust* these guys, right? But consider how we make companies keep more or less honest books. We don't have vast numbers of accountants on the public payroll, counting through the receipts of everyone from Exxon to the corner store. The state lays down the basic book-keeping rules, and makes every business pay for an independent auditor to make sure that the rules are obeyed. Classic self-regulation, at little cost to the taxpayer.

Why not do the same for pollution control, product and workplace safety? A raft of pilot schemes is now under way to do just that. One is the "Responsible Care" programme, started by the Canadian Chemical Producers Association in the 1980s and now operating in 40 countries. Each firm agrees to adopt the concept of "product stewardship"—cradle-to-grave responsibility by a manufacturer for its product—and to seek continuous improvements in product safety, environmental protection, and worker and public health. In the United States, the chemical industry claims that Responsible Care has led to the lowest workforce injury and illness rates of any manufacturing sector, and has cut toxic emissions by 60 per cent in five years.

Such programmes are still in their infancy, and have many problems. For example, so far most self-regulating schemes lack transparency: they are not based on publicly available rules with published emissions levels. Nor are self-regulating companies usually accountable to anyone but themselves. These defects are recognized by some in industry, and attempts to correct them are being tested. So too is the concept of having such schemes formally registered with government, with legal or political sanctions for noncompliance.

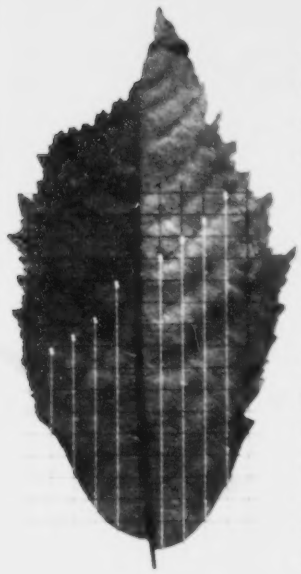
Government likes self-regulation because it is cheap. And the SD lobby, somewhat unwillingly, is coming to accept this approach, especially for the developing world and "economies in transition." If Europe and North America couldn't afford command-and-control, how can countries with far fewer lawyers, administrators, chemical engineers and lab workers? Business says that self-regulation leaves the private sector alone to do what it does best: finding the most cost-effective ways of reaching agreed goals.

Not everyone in the SD camp is happy with this increasingly close relationship. Some environmentalists question the motives of business. But in the end, these are irrelevant. What really matters is what business *does*.

Business motives for SD are complex, and public relations is certainly one of them. Another is staff recruitment and morale: people don't like working for a company that is perceived to be damaging the environment. There are straight bottom-line motives too: bad environmental performance can depress stock prices and cause boardroom firings. It is cheaper to design a new plant for the environmental standards of tomorrow than to engage in expensive retrofits later. And reducing waste has often proved extremely profitable.

Profit. The environment and development movements used to see this as a dirty word. But as these two groups melded into a single SD community, two key realizations started to emerge. The first was that sustainability does not ultimately depend on governments but on business, because business controls more than 90 per cent of the investment that shapes our future. The second was that business is based on profit, so that achieving SD will require making sustainability profitable.

Making the profit motive work for sustainability is a carrot and stick affair—but without the stick the donkey would probably not go for the carrot. In British Columbia, for example, some NGOs have become deeply involved in discussions with the logging industry and government to fine-tune the Forest Practices Code. Other NGOs have simply denounced the code, and have persuaded large US and European customers to boycott British Columbian lumber, pulp and paper derived from clear-cutting of "old-growth" temperate rainforests. A few months ago, two of our biggest logging companies, after years of insisting that



massive clear-cuts were the only economic possibility, announced they were considering selective logging of old-growth forests instead.

In a competitive market, a boycott that cuts sales by a mere 10 per cent can make business hungry for the carrot. One promising carrot is eco-labeling, which enables consumers to make positive SD choices. The problem is to get producers, retailers, campaigners and consumers to agree on who gets this green stamp of approval. What exactly is an energy-efficient light bulb, an organically grown pineapple or a sustainably logged armchair?

To someone reared on the view that you can't trust business at all, sustainability initiatives seem to be cropping up in the oddest places. The world's insurance companies, for example, are seriously worried about global warming, not just because it involves more storms, floods and severe weather, but because these events are unpredictable. Between 1991 and 1997, extreme weather cost the insurance industry US$200 billion, and companies fear that further rapid climate change could cause widespread bankruptcies. As a result, insurance has been lobbying for tighter controls on carbon dioxide than those agreed to in Kyoto last year.

The US Securities and Exchange Commission now insists that all companies quoted on the US stock market disclose significant environmental information. Companies that own contaminated land, for example, must make a provision for clean-up costs in their annual accounts. Like the insurance industry's support for the prevention of global warming, this move reflects the instinctive dislike most businesspeople have for the unexpected. In 1992, the multinational corporation Hanson had to set aside three times its profits for that year because it bought a US company with undisclosed environmental liabilities.

Admittedly, the business concept of SD is still fairly narrow, and mainly focused on the environment. Social justice, or sustainable *human* development, has so far been of much less interest. But just as the disasters at Love Canal and Bhopal helped persuade some private sector leaders that they could not ignore environmental impacts, so too are accusations of human rights abuses by Shell Oil in Nigeria and of exploitation of child labour by Adidas forcing business to start thinking about development impacts.

There have been some interesting results. In Amazonia, Shell has been using "social impact assessments" to try to ensure that natural gas exploitation does not damage indigenous communities. A few major companies such as Sbn Bank in Denmark and Ontario Hydro in Canada are experimenting with annual social reports, covering issues such as labour practices, involvement in the local community and occupational health. Some international accounting firms are trying to develop an expertise in social reporting: KPMG, for example, has been pioneering techniques in South Africa to audit company performance on affirmative action and community investment. Oxfam and other development NGOs have been working with business to measure the labour standards and other aspects of social performance of Northern companies working in the South.

Some environmentalists question the motives of business. But in the end, these are irrelevant. What really matters is what business *does*.

Some businesspeople are beginning to talk of an obligation to report to the public and shareholders on a company's "triple bottom line": social and environmental as well as financial performance.

There are many other examples of using the profit-motive (or "market mechanisms," as business prefers to call them) to promote sustainability. A Swedish pollution tax has cut nitrogen oxide emissions from power plants by one-third, and Danish waste taxes have doubled recycling. The United States allows industry to trade in sulphur dioxide permits, which one study claims have nearly halved emissions at half the cost of earlier regulatory approaches. An innovative programme of the UN University in Tokyo, "ZERI," has been promoting the goal of zero industrial emissions, a target that has already been adopted by some big Japanese firms. Although this at first may sound unrealistic, ZERI's backers argue that the same was initially true of "zero defects" and "zero inventory," two concepts pioneered by Japanese industry and now applied widely—and profitably—elsewhere.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been pioneering another ingenious approach in its Public Private Partnerships (PPP) programme, to address garbage disposal and water pollution in developing country cities. Traditionally, cities borrow capital to invest in such infrastructure, but many do not have the tax base to service a fraction of the loans they need. PPP involves business investing in these fields, bringing its own financial, managerial and technical resources, and with its income coming from government-guaranteed user fees. Provided the related public policy issues can be resolved (Should a "public service" be commercialized? What standards of service must business guarantee?), the PPP approach seems to offer major improvements in urban quality of life.

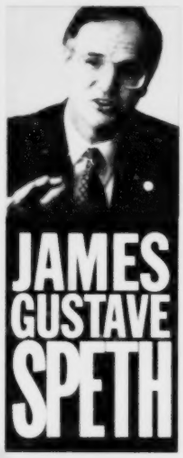
Business and sustainable development remain uneasy bedfellows. But what cannot be denied is that the interface between them is spawning a wealth of intriguing ideas, insights and approaches.

This does not mean that civil society, governments and international institutions such as UNDP should be doing whatever business wants. On the contrary, as the private sector grows beyond the power of all but the largest states, the need for governmental and intergovernmental ground rules—and for grassroots and international analysis, monitoring and criticism—is more urgent than ever. Market mechanisms and self-regulation are still in their infancy. But the pattern of government setting broad goals, and industry working out how to meet (or exceed) them, and being publicly accountable for doing so, will be central to SD in the 21st century. ■

Jon Tinker has worked in environment and development since the mid-1960s. He wrote for New Scientist *from 1969, and founded and headed first Earthscan and later the Panos Institutes. He is currently a senior associate at the Sustainable Development Research Institute at the University of British Columbia in Canada.*

A related UNDP report, entitled "Sustainable Business," is available on the Internet: www.undp.org/undp/ppp.

ZERO VICTIMS



JAMES GUSTAVE SPETH

COMMENTARY

Millions of landmines have been sown this century in every region of the globe. Most are found today in the world's poorest countries, where national and non-governmental capacity to grapple with landmine problems is most limited and where the impact of landmines on civilian populations is most severe.

Landmines exacerbate economic and social problems already faced by most developing countries. On land contaminated by mines, villagers cannot risk plowing their fields and agriculture suffers. In towns and villages where basic services have been targeted by rival forces, parents are afraid to send their children to school or even out to play. Refugees will not return home if they fear their communities have been booby-trapped by mines. And both domestic and foreign investment—so desperately needed—will not materialize while these invisible but brutally real threats remain.

Angolan nationals are being trained in the painstaking, deliberate task of demining.

This issue of CHOICES (page 16) puts a human face on the cruel dilemma that confronts poor people with few options. In Cambodia, landmine casualty figures range from 150 to 300 per month. Cambodia is one of more than 60 countries where demining must compete with many other priorities for which there is inadequate funding or institutional support. This grim scenario, however, is hopefully changing.

The Ottawa Convention, which bans the manufacture, export and deployment of landmines, has been signed by 125 countries since December 1997. It is a milestone in an extraordinary grassroots campaign by organizations and activists worldwide. But just as important as halting future landmine production is the need to neutralize the millions of landmines that maim and kill daily in scores of countries and that stifle the endeavours and opportunities that define human progress.

The United Nations' response to this challenge is called "mine action," a collective, multi-faceted approach. Suspect territory must be surveyed, and landmines must be discovered before they can be cleared; citizens must be taught to identify and avoid minefields; governments must be sensitized to the need for community mine awareness and give support to local demining operations; victims need medical and rehabilitation assistance that will prepare them for reintegration into their communities.

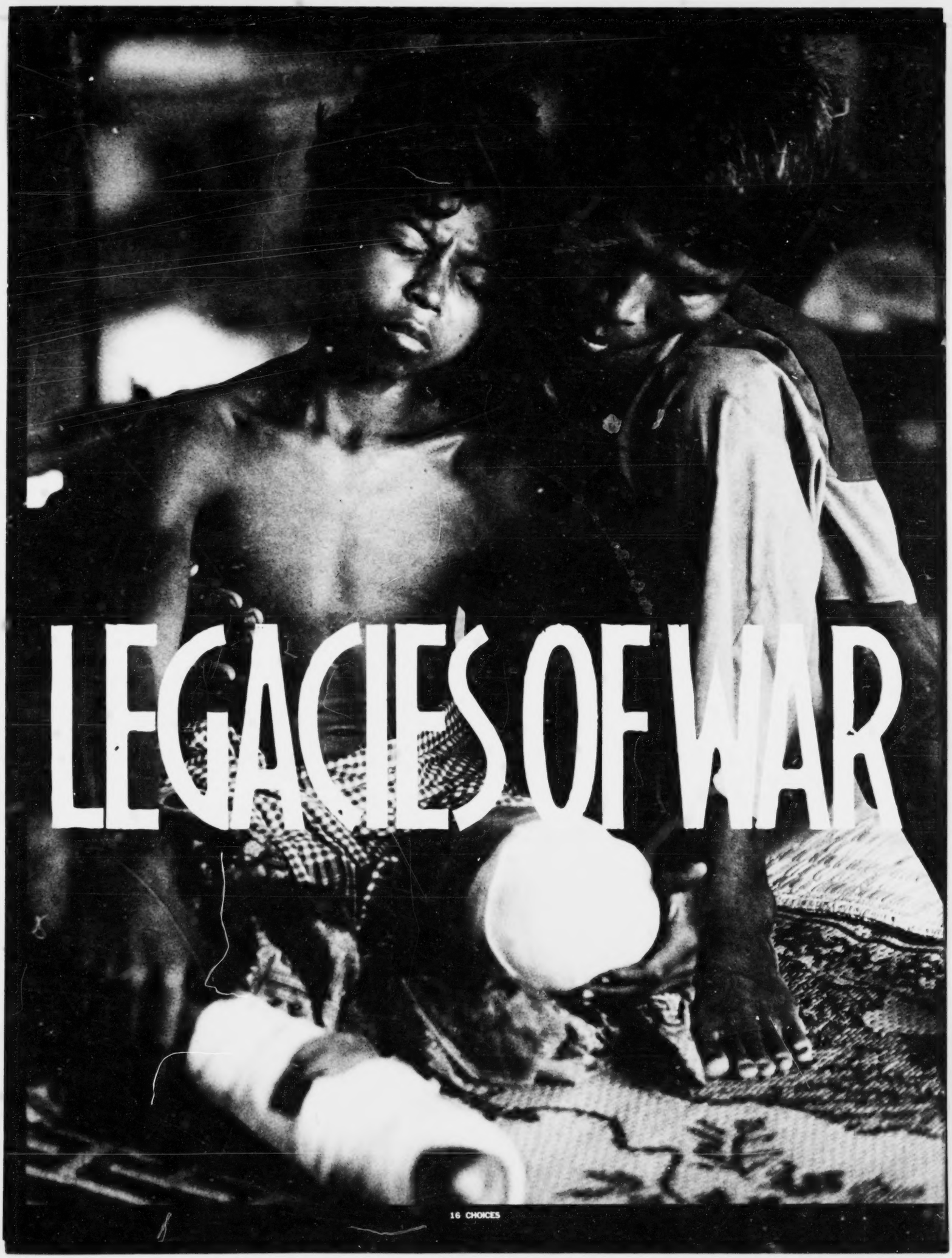
In the United Nations, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations coordinates mine action activities. But ultimately, long-term responsibility for restoring lands to safe, productive use lies with mine-affected countries themselves. UNDP's primary responsibility within the United Nations' approach is to assist countries in building national capacity for sustainable mine action. It helps communities develop the management capacity to plan, implement and support their own mine action programmes and develop the advocacy skills necessary to convince donor governments to give serious attention to funding needs. It works to ensure that national institutions are capable of defining priorities, and of supporting grassroots needs in mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance. UNDP also supports the establishment and maintenance of local institutions capable of providing the technical and managerial training for this work.

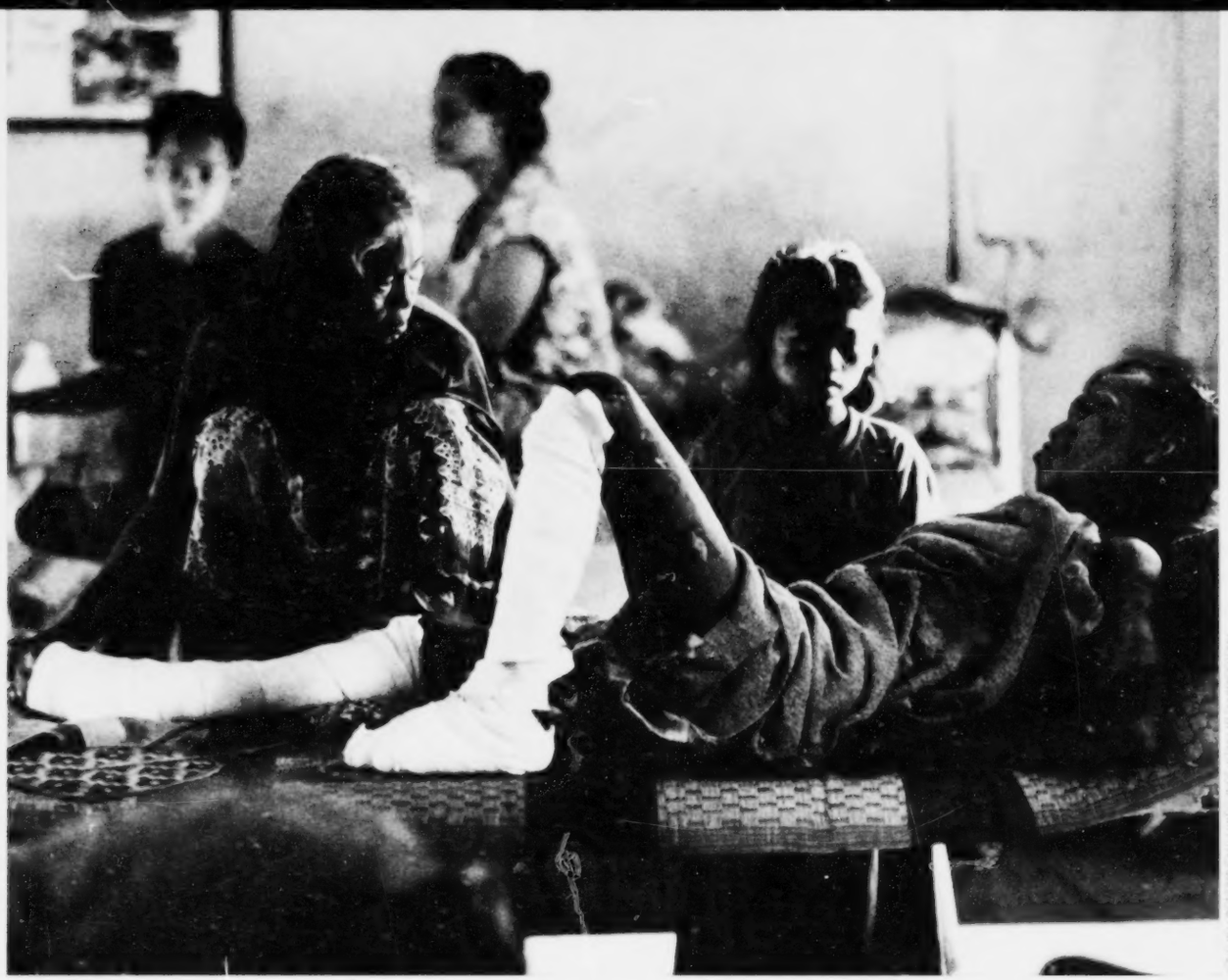
Our partners in this endeavour are non-governmental organizations, local and national authorities, the International Committee of the Red Cross and United Nations agencies including UNICEF and the World Health Organization. We are also reaching out to the private sector through programmes such as "Adopt-a-Minefield," sponsored by the United Nations Association of the United States. In addition, UNDP received two substantial grants for mine action from the United Nations Foundation, which was established by a US$1 billion gift from Ted Turner. These two projects—for mine awareness in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the socio-economic reintegration of victims in several countries—were among the first to be approved by the Foundation and will be implemented in partnership with other agencies.

The Ottawa Convention was only a beginning. In May, the United States sponsored an international conference in Washington to develop a donor strategy to achieve the goal of "zero victims" from landmines and to mobilize the resources necessary for comprehensive action. Participants at this conference agreed that the goal is achievable within years, not decades, provided these resources are forthcoming.

The best hope we have of reaching the target of zero victims in the coming years is to build local mine action capacity in affected countries. It will take critical commitment and concerted action at the global and national level as well as a dedicated and persistent effort on the ground. It can be done. And when we succeed the benefits to people around the world, and therefore to global security and prosperity, will be great indeed. ■

James Gustave Speth is Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.


LEGACIES OF WAR



(Left) The trauma ward at Battambang Hospital, which receives a steady flow of landmine victims.

(Facing page) A father comforts his 12-year-old son whose legs were blown off by a landmine as he walked through a rice field.

CAMBODIA

With the recent death of Pol Pot, one chapter of Cambodia's grisly history has come to an end. Still, the painful process of national reconciliation goes on. So too does the war against landmines, which continue to maim and kill and stymie development in rural areas, where 85 per cent of the population lives. Earlier this year, a group of international journalists, including Magnum photographer Philip Jones Griffiths, travelled to the Cambodian countryside as part of a UNDP-sponsored tour to see firsthand the country's efforts to recover.

"The ground exploded around me," says Chan Sareth in a halting voice. The 15-year-old, round-faced, bangs brushed to the side, a chequered Khmer scarf flung over his shoulder, recalls the day he had gone fishing with two friends and tripped over an anti-personnel landmine.

He was barely 13 when he stumbled on the deadly device near his native village of Toul Prom in northwest Cambodia. He remembers only the searing pain in his leg, for he then lost consciousness. "For a long time, I hoped my leg would grow back," he says, as he tries out the prosthesis made for him at the orthopaedic centre of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the province of Battambang.

The four to six million yet undetonated mines in Cambodia can strike without warning, indiscriminately: the grandfather in the rice paddies, the child leading buffalo to pasture, the mother searching for kindling in the forest. More than 300 people die or are maimed each month in this way. Since the withdrawal of United Nations Peacekeepers in 1993, the minefields have claimed twice as

Mines are cleared just metres away from villagers' homes in Ampil, near the town of Battambang.

A landmine victim.

LEGACIES OF WAR CAMBODIA

Dogs trained in Sweden to sniff out explosives are being employed by the Cambodian Mine Action Centre.

many victims as did the battles, and Cambodia has the highest rate of amputees on the planet—one out of every 236 inhabitants.

The kingdom is patiently getting down to work: with the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the 3,000 mine clearance workers of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) are progressing centimetre by centimetre. The result is minimal in exchange for backbreaking work: they must devote 75 per cent of their time to cutting down vegetation—and the detector goes wild at the smallest metal object. At the current rate—10 square kilometres a year since 1992—it could take up to three decades to locate, defuse and destroy the mines. And the operation is costly: a Chinese, Russian or Vietnamese anti-personnel mine costs between US$2.50 and $25, but from $250 to $800 are needed to neutralize it.

To speed up operations, former Khmer Rouge soldiers have been brought into the mine clearing process. The Swedes have sent explosive-sniffing dogs in order to mark off mine-infested zones. Two 45-tonne tractors fitted with plating resistant even to antitank mines were imported from Germany and Sweden to clear the fields.

Still, the task remains complicated. "There is no mine clearance plan and in the places that have changed hands several times in the past 20 years, the demarcation of fields is different," says Sam Sotha, CMAC director. Successive war mongers since 1970 have all planted the "coward's weapon," as he calls them. American aircraft dropped hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel mines in the northeastern part of the country. Until its defeat in 1975, Lon Nol's Republican Army mined the outskirts of towns in order to check the infiltration of the Khmer Rouge. The Vietnamese Army used the same technique in the 1980s to try to seal off the border between Thailand and Cambodia.

The four to six million yet undetonated mines in Cambodia can strike without warning, indiscriminately. More than 300 people die or are maimed each month.

Cambodian factions also resorted to mines to protect the outskirts of their camps. Even peasants planted the devices at night to protect their villages against the incursion of armed thieves. "I found ten mines in my field," explains Hien Kiem, 62, a farmer from the village of Boeng Prei in Battambang province. "I was planning to use them to mark off my plot of land. I kept them at the foot of this tree, but the mine clearance people confiscated them from me," he adds, somewhat vexed.

—Florence Compain, Bangkok bureau chief,
Le Figaro,
Paris, France

In 1970 the jungle was his home: mud, rifles and lessons about revolution. He was 23. His master was Pol Pot, who in the name of the Khmer nation and of communism was planning Cambodia's rebirth.

Prum Sun followed him. He was

LEGACIES OF WAR CAMBODIA

that kind of soldier. Now he's 51 and drinks Coca Cola. He had lost an arm. His son was dead. His daughters were amputees. In 1996 he surrendered.

"We got tired of fighting," he says. And with him, other Khmer soldiers in western Cambodia laid down their arms.

Prum Suu had built up a good career: a simple soldier, he became commander of Banteay Meanchey province, bordering Thailand. Two years ago his troops merged with the Royal Army, and the government requested that he serve as an adviser on a UNDP-backed programme to "reintegrate" former Khmer Rouge soldiers into Cambodian society.

"My job now," Prum Suu assures us, "is peace."

Kong Sokuntho, now a supervisor with the reintegration programme, was imprisoned in a labour camp by the Khmer Rouge in 1975. He escaped four years later when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. He remembers Prum Suu, once a Khmer Rouge commander. Today, both men travel in the same jeep to far-flung villages of rural Cambodia.

The programme is expensive: it costs memory. The condition for peace, the country seems to have decided, is amnesia.

"Recent Cambodian history is a tragic puzzle," says Sokuntho. "You can't balance accounts with this heritage. You must start from zero if you really crave peace."

The future in Phnom Malai today is new houses. It is the market close to the bridge that leads across a military checkpoint into Thailand and its wealth of goods. It is the zigzag road that was opened up through the jungle and cleared by the men in blue of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre.

—Marco Del Corona, foreign news reporter, Corriere Della Sera, *Milan, Italy*

In the land of the "Killing Fields," anti-personnel landmines, anti-tank mines and unexploded ordnance have become part of the soil. Decades of war, invasions and insurgencies have claimed a deadly toll. And this is in addition to the genocide of the 1970s.

But there is another aspect to life in Cambodia: the hope that has been generated in some areas where development is taking root.

Another aspect to life in Cambodia: the hope that has been generated in some areas where development is taking root.

Parts of Sisophan province—especially Phnom Malai and Pailin—are classic examples of how peace and development can transform the lives of ordinary people. Whole villages that have grown up in refugee camps across the border in Thailand have returned at different stages to resettle in these areas, which have come under government control under a peace pact. There, the Cambodian Area Reconciliation and Rehabilitation plan, known as CARERE, is being carried out with the support of UNDP.

Roads are being laid, land is being cleared of mines both for agriculture and housing, schools and health centres are opening up. Communication links are being established, and people are beginning to move from village to village, district to district, safely. A small amount of trade has begun.

Villagers, including children, are alerted to the dangers of landmines in Kbal Krabey.

In this process of transformation, individuals like Prum Suu emerge as role models. Once a Khmer Rouge commander in Sisophan, he is now an adviser to the reconciliation programme.

Equally impressive are the many village women who are becoming grassroots leaders. The women tend to dominate the newly elected village and commune development committees that have sprung up under CARERE, giving life to the concept of democracy.

—Jayanth Vasudevan, Southeast Asia correspondent, The Hindu, *Madras, India*

"The great tragedy of mines is the lack of arable land," says Paul Matthews, UNDP resident representative in Cambodia. A tour of the remote rural areas of northern Cambodia illustrates Matthews' words. Boeng Prey is a village of 111 families in the province of Battambang. Here, because land is scarce, rice paddies literally coexist with mines. Accidents happen when villagers go out in the fields in search of food or water.

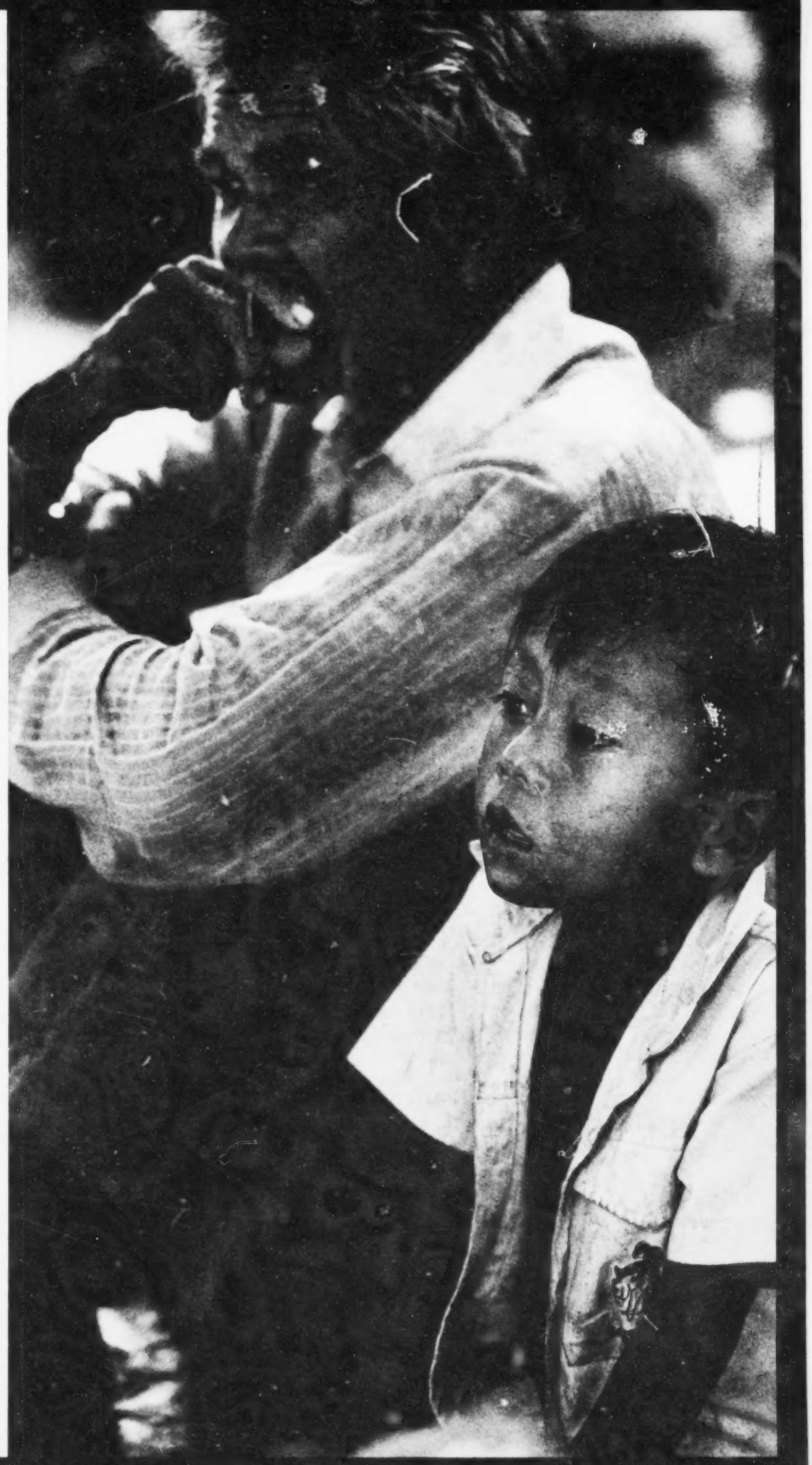
"When we arrived about a year ago, 50 persons a month were dying. Now it's down to 10," says Canadian military official Rejean Cote with pride. Cote and others assist and train Cambodian nationals in the painstaking job of locating mines hidden underground. Most of them are ex-combatants (from all factions) who have turned over their arms, tired of fighting a civil war that led nowhere. Than Then, an ex-Khmer Rouge, is no taller than the metal detector he clutches in his hands. Today, for $49 a month, he spends his time clearing ground that, not long ago, he booby-trapped with mines.

The situation is similar in Kbal Krabey, where 46 families live surrounded by eight minefields. You have to think twice before going out.

"I know where the mines are and I warn my family," says Khim Naren, 43, a former Royal Army soldier who wears a Communist uniform because it is the only clothing he has.

"No, he doesn't know. He only thinks he knows," says Australian mine expert Michael McDonnell. "That's how accidents happen."

—Ana Romero, social issues editor, El Mundo, *Madrid, Spain* ■



SAVING VILLAGE LIFE

The exodus of men to the cities has meant that women in some of the poorest areas of Nepal and China have taken charge. If China's experience can serve as a model, support to women in Nepal could have a profound impact on the country's rural areas.

Khoplang, Nepal—The women of Nepal who, in the Hindu tradition, have seldom spoken critically in public, are now openly voicing demands to the men in their own families, and to their country. These demands—aimed at easing the crushing burdens of holding family and farm together as more and more husbands, fathers and sons seek work in the cities—could bring about significant changes in the quality of rural life, which is rapidly disappearing in other parts of the world. For an observer who has travelled widely in China, the situation bears striking similarities to that of China's poorest provinces, where women have played a significant role in keeping village life viable.

Over the last decade, Nepalis—mostly men—have been abandoning the countryside at accelerating rates, swelling the population of the capital city Kathmandu from 400,000 in 1991 to nearly two million residents today. In development parlance, the men are in the front line of a modernization process that Nepal desperately needs if it is to wrench itself out of crippling poverty. (The *Human Development Report 1997* placed Nepal as 154th on a scale ranking 175 countries in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and purchasing power.)

However, most of the country's 20 million inhabitants still live in some 3,500 villages. Here, conditions remain primitive—clean drinking water is rare and health care minimal. During the monsoons, the few rural dirt roads turn into flooded ruts. Not only is money scarce. Markets are often inaccessible and thus cannot help much in easing the arduous daily tasks of survival for individuals, families and villages.

The exodus of men to urban areas is now straining the family ties that have long held these villages together. The men hope to make some money in sundry jobs one finds in any big city. The better educated hope to buy a piece of urban land and bring their families to settle on it. The less educated often migrate far and wide—even beyond the country's borders—just to earn some cash. If all the migrants were able to make a decent living in the cities, the villages of Nepal would have already been well on the way to disappearing. Instead, they continue to exist, but with few working-age men, and with women performing men's work as well as traditional female tasks.

Increasingly, the faces one sees in these villages are those of women, the elderly and children. "My village looks more deserted day by day," laments one elderly resident of this remote mid-mountain hamlet.

In theory, city-centred modernization and industrialization should ripple out fast enough to begin to revitalize the villages. At the least, money the men send back home should allow the women to enjoy some economic power—let them pay school fees, buy clothes, medicine and small-scale farm equipment. This stepped-up commerce should in turn stimulate small-scale industry. When a rural settlement can support even a little bit of industry and commerce alongside its farming, development of villages as well as towns should follow.

But Nepal, with its far-flung villages and mountain terrain, is not following the model. Development requires movement of people, capital and goods. Nepal has some fine roads, built with foreign aid, but virtually no all-weather routes connecting villages to towns. Thus, village

A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES

By Franz Schurmann

commerce is almost non-existent. To spend cash sent home from the city at best requires a long, spine-rattling journey by truck to the nearest town. At worst, it means a long trek on foot. In many villages, ancestral lands are being sold off to the highest bidder—either by emigrant men who have managed to bring their families to the city, or by villagers no longer able to cultivate it themselves. The new owners are often outsiders—one Khoplang resident used the English word "capitalist" to describe them—who plan to use it for investment purposes only, not for the benefit of the village as a whole.

A visit to Khoplang, a steep three-hour walk uphill from a tiny town at the end of a badly rutted road, makes clear the human reality underlying Nepal's deeply entrenched poverty. Here, as elsewhere in rural Nepal, the term "village" designates a group of scattered hamlets. Thus "Khoplang" designates the village as a whole as well as its chief hamlet. The men who remain here are either young or older than working age. They have helped to build a handsome school. But it is the women who have assumed the relentless cycle of daily chores—cultivating fields as well as cooking and caring for children and the aged; collecting water and firewood, which often requires climbs of several hours up and down steep trails; washing laundry, again at distant taps to keep soap from contaminating the drinking water; and preparing grains by turning—for hours—small, ancient grindstones.

On our first day in Khoplang, the men presented their new school. The next day, we were surprised early in the morning to find some thirty women gathered in front of the home of an elder, waiting to talk with me and my Nepali host. Two hours of back and forth discussion followed. As with other women's groups encountered in Nepal, one woman quickly emerged as spokesperson and leader. It was evident that this "mothers group" as they called themselves was well organized.

The specific issue prompting their meeting was the imminent arrival of electricity in Khoplang. We could see the poles in place along the steep path to the village. The women wanted to secure outside help for a key project—getting a power-driven grinding mill that would cost the equivalent of about US$3,200.

More than a windfall from the outside world, what the women are desperately seeking is a way to cut down the time spent on daily chores. For several years, we learned, the women of Khoplang have been meeting to discuss how to do this. And they had quickly realized that the most effective approaches would have to include all the hamlets of the village—not just one household.

Talks with both older officials and younger field workers in District Development Committees (DDCs)—Nepal's new local government institutions—revealed that similar discussions are under way in many other villages. Pushed to the limits of their endurance by the absence of working-age men, more and more women are organizing themselves to demand changes before they collapse and bring down what remains of their families and villages with them. The DDC officials call this a "social mobilization movement" and acknowledge that women are at its core.

The catalyst for women even to consider taking responsibility at the village level was Nepal's shift to democracy in 1990. For the first time, the new government's multiparty system called for a form of governance based on the need for rural development. Thus the DDCs came into being. In addition to serving as the chief administrative agencies in each district, the DDCs were mandated to promote village development. And Village Developmental Councils (VDCs) were formed to undertake development projects.

This visitor saw a number of projects sponsored by DDCs and often supported by foreign aid—creating credit and savings groups, holding sewing and tailoring classes, teaching para-medical and veterinary skills, forming village associations

near national game park preserves to protect residents from marauding animals. What is striking is that the bulk of them are formed by village women.

Women filled the chairs at village planning meetings in Kavre, Shisheghat, Rupandehi and Chitwan, and did most of the talking. Even more surprising, women in Khoplang and other villages voiced exactly the same five development demands—a women's manifesto:

- Clean drinking water delivered at affordable cost near their homes.
- Outhouse latrines and sewage disposal that will not contaminate village water sources.
- Health posts staffed by one or two para-medical personnel with basic medicines (to supplement traditional herbal remedies).
- All-weather rural roads, especially in the Kathmandu Valley, other mid-elevation regions with large numbers of villages and in the southern Terai. (These would allow full use of the already existing fine trunk roads.)
- Finally, a statement that village-level "income-generation"—a development approach vigorously backed by DDCs, the central government and foreign aid agencies—can significantly take off if the above four conditions are met.

The first four conditions would significantly reduce the work load of women. Gathering firewood would remain a problem. But with nearby drinking water, better health for children and the elderly, and all-year and all-weather road access to the urban world, women would have much more time for income-generation. And if these demands were fulfilled for all villages, the entire country would start surging ahead.

Consistently, village women expressed their interest in earning more money. Its importance was also evident in the meticulous way that credit and savings groups keep financial records. Once the women earn significant amounts of money they become empowered vis-à-vis their men, both individually within the family and collectively in the village. When their new money joins the older money coming from their men's remittances, they can afford to keep ancestral land rather than sell it off. And perhaps their wildest dream is that if all their villages make economic advances they will become partners with the towns and cities in larger national development progress.

Some might doubt that such small steps as those demanded by the women could ever make a dent on a countryside so impoverished and isolated as Nepal's. But there is a symmetry between the situation in Nepal and the remarkable development transforming neighbouring China's poorest and most populous rural provinces: Henan and Sichuan.

Two decades ago, neither Henan nor Sichuan could boast much in the way of modern industry or commerce. Their agriculture was so backward that millions of men were straining to migrate to better-off provinces. Today a visitor will see rich green fields everywhere, and new factories, businesses and family houses springing up. Recently, the *China Daily* reported that in Henan, per capita income in 1996 was up 13.8 per cent over the previous year and grain yield in Sichuan province topped all previous records. The *Human Development Report 1997* notes that China over the last 20 years has halved the number of its people living below the poverty line.

In conversations in Beijing, the subject of "outer province workers" came up again and again. It is widely acknowledged that without their low-wage labour, nothing much would have been built in Beijing

Nepali women have assumed the relentless cycle of daily chores, along with many of the responsibilities traditionally held by men.

or other booming cities. But what about the women left behind? There are indications that they have played an important role in rural China's socio-economic transformation.

A recent survey of rural Sichuan found that 35 per cent of rural men had off-farm employment in contrast to only two per cent of women. But in over half of the farms surveyed, women were in charge. Thus, women farmers in Sichuan must have accounted for half of its huge jump in grain yields in 1996. All this while not only managing the farms but taking care of the usual one child and several aged relatives. Furthermore, in Henan, Sichuan and Hubei provinces, many rural farmhouses have tiny ground floor restaurants run by women. As one woman in a village near Wuhan City said, "I have to cook for my big family anyway, so why not cook a little more and m[illegible] some income?"

It is obvious that a key element was the building of infrastructure in China's rural areas. Not only trunk roads but all-weather rural roads link villages, towns and cities. Except for remote regions, electricity now extends throughout most of rural China. Illiteracy still exists, but new rural schools are rapidly reducing it. A huge amount of income is generated by the new industrial "town-village enterprises." Everywhere, shops, stores and even malls are popping up. Even more striking are the huge expanses of fertile fields. Many are now covered by long plastic sheets where "four seasons" greens, tubers and pulses are grown for the mushrooming restaurants.

In the rural areas people must boil the water but it is clean and accessible. Latrines are sometimes unsavoury but waste removal is efficient. Access to health care (modern or traditional) is widespread. And women appear to have time to engage in income-generation. It seems that in China, a major partnership among government, men and—maybe in the end most important—women made possible the visible revitalization of the Chinese countryside.

In 1979, when China launched its rural reforms, its leaders decided they were not going to forsake the interior regions in favour of a crash industrialization of their already advanced coastal areas. The first reform was the farm contract system which, in essence, brought family farming back to China. Farm output soared.

Coastal industrialization then took off in 1984, creating powerful magnets that began to draw millions of men from family farming to urban industrial and commercial jobs. When the infrastructure came into place, men knew they could easily travel back and forth between village and city. With ever improving living conditions in the villages, men did not feel they had to rescue their families by bringing them into the city. And when the men left for the cities and towns, the women met the challenge of keeping their families and villages intact.

Is there any way small Nepal can profit from the lesson of huge China? Perhaps a key is that in developing countries industrialization, modernization and urbanization rely on a partnership between the urban and the rural. China's recent economic reforms began in the rural areas and have now rebounded from the coastal regions back to China's immense rural hinterland. Nepal is small but in relative terms it, too, has a big hinterland. That means that top priority must be given to rural development not just in words but in deeds, and no deeds are as important for rural development as carrying out the manifesto for Nepal's increasingly organized village women.

A second lesson suggests that while building infrastructure is one development priority, forming political partnerships among men, women and government is another. In China—and other developing countries as well—women in villages and men in cities already have formed partnerships to keep their families going in both places. If government support comes down to the streets and fields then that could assure development success in the future. In this way, the optimistic view of the *Human Development Report* that poverty worldwide can be defeated early in the next century might be realized. ■

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MOTHERS OF INVENTION

Left alone to fend for themselves and their families for long stretches of time, the women of Khoplang have turned to each other for support.

Mana Devi, founder and chairperson of Khoplang's "mothers group," said that one of the women's main concerns was making it easier to collect water each day. As a result, the group established rules for pumping at the well, not only to prevent crowding and disputes but to ensure that every family, including those from outlying areas, would have access to the pump.

In another instance, after talking to people in the community, group members decided that a second priority was money to buy seeds and fertilizer. So they formed savings and loan groups. Each member deposits ten rupees (about 17 US cents) into a general fund during fortnightly meetings. These funds are then loaned at rates and terms determined collectively.

Asked what the women wanted most, the answer came quickly: a grinding machine. Today, after threshing the grain, the women grind it by hand. The alternative is to carry it more than 300 metres downhill to the small town near the river, pay to have it ground, and then to lug it back up the hill to the village, which can take up to a full day. With electricity soon to arrive in Khoplang, this simple labour-saving device could go a long way in relieving women's burdens.

—Jayahari Raj Pandey

NOTEBOOK

AID: PERCEPTION AND REALITY

New York—As Cold War tensions eased in the late 1980s, the use of foreign aid as leverage in the power struggle for influence in the developing world was bound to decline—and did. In time, however, policymakers blamed the decline on "aid fatigue" among donor country citizens supposedly tired of their taxes going South. Privately, policymakers were afflicted with their own aid fatigue, which held that because poverty hadn't been overcome during the many years of competitive Cold War giving, perhaps the South's continuing backwardness was its own fault. This obviated the need for further concern.

In fact, with a few exceptions, "aid fatigue" doesn't exist. That is the startling conclusion of a major UNDP study of 30 existing opinion surveys recording public perceptions of foreign aid in major donor countries over more than two decades. Polling data from 1983 to 1995, for example, show that citizen support for foreign aid has remained the same or even increased somewhat in almost all of these countries. The exceptions: the United States (down a mere five per cent), France (down eight per cent) and Belgium (down 15 per cent). Actual increases of up to seven per cent in support levels were recorded in Australia, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

In addition to exposing what it calls the "bizarre disconnect" between public opinion and public policy, the report—compiled by UNDP's Office of Development Studies (ODS)—reveals a lot about the type of foreign aid citizens in the affluent North prefer to give, along with their misgivings about how aid is distributed.

The 33-page study also punctures additional myths, notably the prevailing view in Washington that the American public has little regard for the United Nations as an aid deliverer. Polls show that both American and European public opinion overwhelmingly supports the UN as the best means for reaching large numbers of people quickly and efficiently. Only 18 per cent of Americans polled and a mere eight per cent of Europeans thought their own governments could do better.

Inge Kaul, ODS director, hopes that with a broader understanding of the rationales behind foreign aid, the donor community will be better able to gain approval for new strategies to meet the realities of the 21st century. "A rapidly globalizing and integrating world," says Kaul, "is still going to need foreign aid. But to be effective, we need to build a constituency supporting new kinds of aid, ranging from projects helping to stabilize financial markets to expanding access to the Internet, to name a few."

Building such a constituency will not be easy. UNDP's study shows that most people in the North favour aid to victims of disasters and refugees. Two other popular priorities include aid for improving health and protecting the environment.

There is far less understanding of the need for long-term development assistance. Among Canadians, for example, confidence in the success of emergency aid projects is more than double the level for long-term projects. And a 1995 European Union (EU) survey found that most Europeans do not believe that aid is effective in reducing poverty. Such scepticism may be linked to a widespread belief that help may not be reaching those for whom it was intended. Surveys clearly indicate that developing country governments as a whole are viewed in donor countries as dictatorial and corrupt.

Still, support for the work of the UN remains high, especially among the young. Nearly three-quarters of all Americans under 30 are favourably impressed with the UN, slipping to 65 per cent for those over 65—

still a hefty majority. In the EU, the UN enjoys similar approval ratings among the young.

The report is important not only for setting the record straight on public support for foreign aid, but for recommending steps to close the huge perception gap that still exists on almost all sides of the issue. Among the recommendations are a call for establishing new support networks linked to the many businesses and private agencies with a stake in maintaining a "global balance" between North and South so essential to fostering stable trade relations.

The report concludes that support for such pro-aid campaigns should not overlook "the consequences of inaction." The dangers to the North would appear to be obvious: humanitarian concerns aside, a South in poverty will scarcely be able to afford Northern goods and services. And the social, political and economic uncertainties inherent in the lives of the poor of the developing world will only further rile already fragile stock and currency markets there.

To obtain a copy of "Development Aid: What the Public Thinks," contact the Office of Development Studies, UNDP, 336 East 45th Street, UH 402, New York, NY 10017; fax: (212) 906-3676; e-mail: ginia.patil@undp.org ■

—Lloyd Garrison

Despite widespread acceptance of the notion of "aid fatigue," public support for foreign aid averaged 80 per cent among major donor countries in 1995, higher than in 1983.

Public Support For Foreign Aid

1995 Rank	*1983*	*1995*	*1995 Rank*	*1983*	*1995*
1 Spain		95%	12 Norway		80%
2 Ireland	86%	92%	13 Germany	81%	79%
3 The Netherlands	89%	90%	13 Japan	79%	79%
4 Denmark	86%	89%	15 Switzerland		78%
5 Portugal		88%	16 France	81%	73%
6 Luxembourg	87%	87%	17 Australia	65%	72%
6 Italy	81%	87%	18 New Zealand	70%	
8 Sweden		84%	19 Austria		68%
9 Finland		82%	20 Belgium	81%	66%
9 United Kingdom	81%	82%	21 United States	50%	45%
9 Canada		82%	Average	78%	80%

Source: UNDP Office of Development Studies

AID: THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

Tokyo, Japan —Far away from their country's battlefields and battered towns, four Bosnian religious leaders—Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox Christian and Jewish—sat down in a Buddhist meeting hall here and agreed to work together to heal their society.

The 6 March event went practically unnoticed by the media. Nevertheless it set the stage for the next two days, when more than 40 representatives of all major faiths pledged to collaborate to end world poverty. The gathering was co-sponsored by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and the UN Development Programme —itself an unlikely alliance, but one that aims to galvanize support among the religious community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies for grassroots development.

Eradicating poverty will require a broad range of actions, including the establishment by governments of appropriate policy and legal frameworks, said Rosina Wiltshire, deputy director of UNDP's bureau for development policy, in Tokyo. But it is the institutions of civil society—the schools, the media and religious organizations—she said, "that are the most powerful shapers of what is meaningful and worthy for billions of people." It is these institutions that can effectively get people to act.

In Sierra Leone in 1997, for example, a newly formed religious coalition was able to mobilize badly needed emergency relief when other sources of help had gone. After the 11th coup in 20 years the country had reached rock-bottom, explained John McAuley, a Catholic priest and associate secretary general of WCRP. As a result, Sierra Leone was subjected to an international embargo. "There was no one from the outside to turn to, so the religious groups and their constituencies had only themselves to rely on," he said.

Chandra Muzaffar (left) and Afshan Moshin Khan.

As the last remaining civil authority on the ground, the coalition raised volunteers and gathered donations among their communities. Once the food relief and health efforts got under way, the group led initiatives to demobilize child soldiers and respond to human rights abuses.

Sierra Leone is one of many examples of interfaith cooperation in fighting poverty in areas of "dramatic religious pluralism," said William Vendley, secretary general of WCRP. These programmes usually start with modest steps, such as micro-credit to women entrepreneurs in poor neighbourhoods. Yet on occasion they can reach monumental proportions, as with Sarvodaya Shramadana, a rural community-building movement involving more than six million people in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

A sense of urgency pervaded the meeting in Tokyo because of Asia's financial reversals, which have cast millions back into poverty in what was once the world's fastest-growing region. The crisis, triggered by investor flight, shows the volatility of a global economy, a hotly debated topic among seminar participants.

"Globalization is changing the role of money from that of a medium of exchange to a commodity bought and sold for profit," said Chandra Muzaffar, the Malaysia-based head of the International Movement for a Just World. "To earn what the world's highest-paid business executive makes in just one day, an average Sri Lankan would have to work for 1,200 years," he added.

Against such odds, it is futile to speak of catching up. A better strategy, said Wiltshire, would be to aim for a change in basic priorities on both sides of the economic divide, and religious organizations have the moral authority to bring this about. "The underlying goal should be a shift in values, from accumulating wealth at the expense of human life to those in which human life has the greatest worth," she said.

Such values can be important in countering the despair caused by the gross inequities within the globalized economy, said Afshan Moshin Khan, an educator working with Pakistani youths in poor urban neighbourhoods. In Pakistan, micro-credit programmes have seen a high success rate, she pointed out, because they are based on a traditional understanding of economic ethics. Though the practice of *zakat* is defined as alms-giving, that is, the sharing of wealth after prayers, the concept goes beyond charity to guidelines for income distribution and employment opportunities.

Manlio Dell'Ariccia, the Rome-based representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, suggested that a similar ethic should pervade foreign aid. Rich donor countries need to remind themselves that assistance to the poor is not merely a balm for the conscience, he said, but a matter of social justice that demands sustained action to end the harmful condition and to heal the rift.

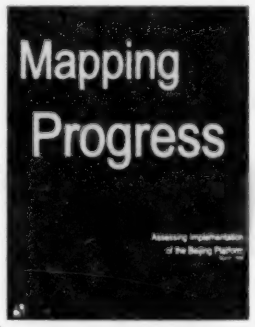
"The Talmud informs us: 'If anyone takes a life, it is as if one destroys an entire world. In rescuing a life, one saves an entire world,'" explained Dell'Ariccia. He added: "But how many worlds are destroyed each day by poverty?" ■

—Yoichi Clark Shimatsu

A TRIBUTE TO BELLA

Bella Abzug, a lifelong public activist and former US congresswoman, died on 31 March at the age of 77. Abzug was a regular on the international stage fighting for women's rights, environmental and economic justice, and sustainable development.

As co-founder and president of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Abzug was instrumental in shaping the agenda of the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing. Thus it is a fitting tribute to her that WEDO's latest report, *Mapping Progress: Assessing Implementation of the Beijing Platform*, provides a country-by-country look at the progress made by governments since the Beijing event.



The report found that over 70 per cent of the world's 187 countries have approved or drafted national plans for women's advancement, as outlined by the Beijing Platform. Sixty-four countries have adopted legislation or policies to address women's rights.

But the report also reveals that fiscal austerity measures in industrialized as well as developing countries and the current economic turmoil in Asia have had a crippling effect on many positive legislative efforts. "On balance, women are still the shock absorbers for structural change," notes Susan Davis, WEDO executive director.

To obtain a copy of *Mapping Progress*, contact WEDO at 355 Lexington Avenue, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10017; fax: (212) 973-0335; e-mail: wedo@igc.apc.org. A summary can be found on their Web site: http://www.wedo.org ■

— Dianne Sherman

MATTERS OF FACT

Information is drawn from the *Human Development Report 1997*, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. The report is published in English by Oxford University Press (paperback ISBN 0-19-511997-5; hardbound 0-19-511996-7), and in eight other language editions by a variety of publishers.

Overkill. In 1995 the world spent more than US$1.5 million each minute on **defence** — a total of nearly $800 billion. › The cost of achieving basic social services for all has been estimated at $40 billion a year for ten years — a total of $400 billion. That is half of what was spent globally on the military in 1995 alone. › More than **110 million landmines** are buried in 68 countries, with an equal number stockpiled around the world. More than **2 million children** died as a result of armed conflict in the past decade, in part because of landmines. › Half the world's governments pay more to guard against military attack than to fight the **enemies of health.** In the early 1990s, Angola, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Qatar and Yemen spent about twice as much on the **military** as they did on **health** and **education**; the Syrian Arab Republic spent almost four times as much. Thirty leading industrialized countries exported nearly $22 billion worth of conventional **weapons** in 1995 — 94% of the world total. The USA exported 51% of the world's weapons, followed by the Russian Federation (13%), Germany (8%) and the United Kingdom (6%). › There were close to 22 million people serving in the **armed forces** worldwide in 1995, two-thirds of them from developing countries. Kuwait spent $2,091 per capita on the military in 1995, South Africa spent $88, Mexico $30, Viet Nam $12, and Costa Rica $6. › Official development assistance provided by the United States in 1995 was **only 3%** of what the country spent on defence that year.